The Story of the Prophet Jeremiah

Background
Focus: Jeremiah, the challenger of false prophets (the book of Jeremiah)

Jeremiah was a major prophet during the decline and fall of the Southern Kingdom around Jerusalem (Judah). He lived during the time of the last five kings of Judah and was called to be a prophet around 627 BCE when he was about 20 years old. He felt that the word of the Lord was “like a burning fire shut up in my bones” (Jeremiah 20:9). He lived through the invasions of Nebuchadnezzar who destroyed Jerusalem.

Material
The story of the prophet Jeremiah is in a basket on one of the Old Testament shelves.

The basket contains:
- a dark brown felt strip
- a shofar
- a lion
- a wolf
- a linen belt
- pouch containing broken pieces of clay pottery
- a plate of nasty food
- a cup filled with poison
- a piece of chain
- a pyramid
- an image of Jerusalem restored

You’ll also need the summary of the law from the basket containing The Ten Best Ways.

As you tell the story of the prophet Jeremiah, place objects on the underlay to remind you of each important event or prophecy. Unroll the underlay slowly, providing just enough space for each object as it’s presented, as if you are unrolling a life. At the end of the wondering, place each object back in the basket saying something about each event, like “Here is the linen belt God told Jeremiah to hide in the rocks,” and so forth. Lastly, model how to roll up the underlay and place it in the basket.

 Movements

Move with deliberation to the shelf where the material waits.

 Words

Watch. Watch where I go.
Everything needs to be ready.

This is the story of the prophet Jeremiah. But what is a prophet?

Prophets are people who come so close to God and God comes so close to them that they know what God wants. Sometimes people do not like the message, so they become very angry with the prophet. It’s not easy being a prophet.

Jeremiah lived in the great city of Jerusalem after the Assyrian army had come and gone. God said, “I will make you a prophet to the nations.” Jeremiah was worried, because he was still so young.

God said, “Don’t worry. I will be with you.”

One day Jeremiah went all around inside and outside the city walls blowing a trumpet. The people asked him, “Why are you blowing a trumpet?” He said, “You have gone too far away from God. It is time to come back. God said, ‘I am the one who led you through the water into freedom and across the desert. I gave you the Ten Best Ways to live. I am your God. You are my people. Come back!’”

God showed Jeremiah things that would happen in Jerusalem, things so frightening that even hearing about them would make the ears of the people tingle.

Jeremiah was afraid. But he did what God told him to do. He said, “A nation will come and attack us like a lion and destroy us like a wolf,” but the people would not listen.

Another time Jeremiah went into the temple. He said to the people there, “Pay attention! Remember the Ten Commandments. Love God and love people. Stop worshiping other gods. God says, ‘Turn around. Change your ways, or I will tear down the temple,’” but still the people would not listen.
Place the linen belt on the underlay.

Once God told Jeremiah to buy a linen belt and put it around his waist. Then God told him to take it off and hide it in some rocks. Many days later, God told him to go back and get it, but now it was ruined and completely useless. God said, “The people are like this belt. They refuse to listen to my words and are now completely useless!”

Place the pouch containing the broken pieces of clay pottery on the underlay. When you speak of breaking the jar, pour out the pieces onto the underlay.

Another day God told Jeremiah to go buy a clay jar from a potter and take it to the Valley of Ben Hinmon. There, in the presence of the people, he broke the jar, and said, “God says, ‘I will smash this nation and this city just as this potter’s jar is smashed and cannot be repaired.’” So Jeremiah’s words made the people very angry—so angry that they put his hands and feet into pieces of wood called stocks and left him there overnight. Many more times they put him into prison. They did not want to listen.

Place the plate of nasty food and the cup of poison on the underlay as you mention each one.

While Jeremiah was prophesying, there were false prophets throughout the country. A false prophet is someone who only pretends to speak for God. They did not tell the people the truth. The false prophets made God very sad and angry.

God told Jeremiah to tell the people that God would punish the false prophets. They will eat bitter food and drink poisoned water. God told Jeremiah to warn the people not to listen to them.

Place the chain on the underlay when you say, “They were in exile.”

Jeremiah had told the truth. The Babylonians did come and destroy the city. They took the king and many of the best people to Babylon. They were in exile. They could not go home.

Place the pyramid on the underlay.

The people remaining in Jerusalem were frightened. They did not want to be taken into exile, so they decided to run away. They went to Egypt and asked Jeremiah if this was the right thing to do. Jeremiah asked God.

God said, “No. They should not go to Egypt.” God promised that the people would be cared for. Once again they refused to listen, and they went to Egypt anyway. They even forced Jeremiah to go with them.
Even as the city of Jerusalem lay in ruins, God spoke words of hope and consolation through Jeremiah, and they were written down and kept for us to read.

“I will bring health and healing to the city. I will heal my people and give them peace. I will bring the people back from exile and will rebuild the city as before. I will forgive them all their sins. A new king will be born - one who will do what is just and right in the land.”